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ROBERT SCOTT, PUBLISHER, LONDON.

THE CHRISTIAN HOPE IN THE APOCALYPSE

By

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LONDON: ROBERT SCOTT
ROXBURGHE HOUSE
PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C

MCMXV

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INTRODUCTION

THE addresses of which this book is composed were delivered at Cambridge in the last week of August to a Summer School arranged by the Board of Study for preparation of missionaries, and have been given this more permanent form at the request of some who heard them. They are published substantially in their original form. With the great critical and historical problems of the Apocalypse I had neither the knowledge nor the desire to deal; those conversant with the literature of the subject will recognize the extent of my debt to such writers as Professor Anderson Scott, the Bishop of Gloucester, and the late

Archbishop Benson. But at a time when ancient apocalyptic is no longer the closed book that it had for so long remained, and when the cataclysm of the war is throwing us back upon whatever bedrock of faith and hope is ours, it may not be inopportune to try to gain strength and consolation from a work over which hangs heavy the cloud of violence and persecution and assault upon all things good, yet not so heavy nor so dark as to blot out the brightness of the heaven beyond and the victory there stored up for all who should endure to the end.

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

J. K. M.

October 11, 1915.

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THE CHRISTIAN HOPE IN THE APOCALYPSE

I

THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

THE Christian Hope in the Apocalypse—that is to be the subject of our meditations in this volume. You will not wonder that I chose this book of the Bible, and in connexion with it one of the three virtues known as theological. We live in days undreamed of—days not without precedent in ages past, but for us who had come to think of civilization as a steadily advancing process, carefully storing up all that it had gained, all that it had learnt, to look

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on ourselves as the heirs of the ages, entering into an inheritance rich in present fulfilment, still richer in future promise—days overpowering and catastrophic in proportion, or rather far out of proportion, to our incredulity that such days could ever be. We thought we knew the things which belonged to our peace—material prosperity, commercial and financial ties binding nation to nation, the growth of supernational harmonies and aspirations, the increasing humanitarianism, things noble and ignoble, the feeling after human brotherhood with the desire to make it real, and the love of ease and comfort, the aversion from war's bloodshed with its attendant barbarities, and the disinclination for hardship and self-sacrifice, the search for truth, and yet a readiness to submit to illusion : whether it were

our virtues or our vices, both alike would make for our peace—and now—the things that make for peace are indeed hidden from our eyes. Is it not a time of Apocalypse, of Revelation, in its suddenness, its horror, its remoteness from all that we had known? How prophetic now sound the lines (yet surely the poet had no vision of such days as these)—

. . . Our Seers said "Peace," and it was not peace ;
Earth will grow worse till men redeem it,
And wars more evil, ere all wars cease.

Yet if we needed a true prophet, a true seer in those past days, do we not need one much more now, to be an interpreter of this awful world-drama? "Understandest thou what thou seest?" Is it not a real question? And what answer have we except that, "How can I, except some man should guide me?"

We who believe in the goodly fellow-

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ship of the prophets believe that that fellowship was not closed with the passing of the first or any later century. We do not so hold to the past as though our God made no present living provision for His people, to warn, cheer, encourage, reveal. But is it not also true that some of the provision which God has made in the past through the men on whom His Spirit came, whether by history or letter, by psalm or prophecy, is in a special way stored up against the future, so that when that future comes, words from the far-past ages ring out as though some master hammer-stroke had forged them on the anvil of a present need or crisis? In a real and true sense the Bible is always new, but now and then we say of some verse or passage, "This is new, this very moment; till now it was before its time; its environ-

ment was not till now created." Luther, I think, felt this about the Epistle to the Galatians, and something of the same kind is true of the effect, almost within our own generation, of the Gospel and the First Epistle of St. John. Of the Apocalypse it has been true many times : but if Christians before us have felt that it was written for their admonition upon whom the ends of the ages had come, we, too, can turn to it, feeling assured that this Christian seer and prophet has not given away all his secrets to ages which perhaps needed them less, and left nothing over for us to find in our distress, so fresh and strong that we learn to hope again.

Hope—it would not be worth while to turn aside from to-day's Apocalypse to an Apocalypse of long ago, unless enshrined in it like a jewel, and blazing

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like a jewel, there lay that for which millions, and we among them, strain our weary eyes. There are times when hope is harder than faith ; when, indeed, it seems almost dead. Faith can cling to God with something of a blind desperation—though He slay me, though He shake the heavens and the earth—and though the desire of all nations tarrieth, yet will I trust in Him. In the gloom and darkness, while the world reels and the strong thunders of God are abroad, faith still holds out. But hope, if any remains, soars and pierces with a vision that transcends the moment : it sees how—

Sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minutes' at end ;
And the element's rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light ! . . .

It is because of the presence of such

a hope, and to understand something of its justification, its character and its teaching, that we open the great Christian Apocalypse and turn to a past vision for a present revelation. .

In recent years there has been a greatly revived interest in apocalyptic literature, and a readiness to bring back apocalyptic ideas and conceptions into the centre of religion from that circumference where they had been allowed to lie as matter of but the second or third order of real meaning and importance. The great outburst of Jewish apocalyptic which characterizes the century and a half before the Christian era, and the first century of that era, has been studied and interpreted. We have seen how through it the cause of the one true God was championed against foreign tyranny and idolatry, and how the Chosen People

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were bidden to look up and wait for the redemption and the new age that should descend upon them out of heaven.

Even the writer of the Apocalypse of Baruch, with the Fall of Jerusalem before his eyes and the cry upon his lips, "Zion hath been taken from us, and we have nothing now save the Mighty One and His Law,"¹ even he holds to the thought, not only of future rewards for the righteous, and punishments for the wicked, but of a triumph to be manifested in this world; of the restoration of Jerusalem for ever after it has been delivered up for a time. And we know how in the Gospels, and in our Lord's own words, the apocalyptic elements which tell not of ordered process, nor of moral duties (though, as we shall see, "apocalyptic" is essentially ethical"),²

¹ Baruch vi. 9, 10. ² Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, ix.

but of sudden revelations and judgments of God, of days whose date man can never foreknow, but for which he must ever be ready, are no longer regarded as mere ornamentation or embroidery, but as essential parts of the picture, as recurring and ever more insistent motifs in the music. And apocalyptic as Pentecost was, we have only to read the apostolic letters of the New Testament to see how little the outflowing of the Spirit on that day exhausted for the Christian Church the expectation of a divine Apocalypse, a new state of things, a Good Time coming. And if what they expected was not realized as they expected, if God's plans for the world were other than they thought and hoped, is that to say that these thoughts and hopes of theirs are valueless to us? Not the form of the apocalyptic vision, not

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the description of the future according to sensuous and imaginative conceptions, not the mystical dates and numbers, not the symbolism now so terrific, now so peaceful, is that essence of apocalyptic which we find still to be an inspiration, an inspiration of a kind and worth not elsewhere to be found. It is the spirit which lies behind apocalyptic, the pre-suppositions of apocalyptic, the power which makes apocalyptic a possibility, that we have to take count of, and on which we can stay ourselves. For all Apocalypse is, as has been said, a Tract for bad times,¹ and it is in such times that man is tested, whether he can rise to any vision of God's ways and purposes, whether the spirit of man can become the candle of the Lord. It is the lighting of that candle which we see

¹ Scott, *Revelation*, p. 11.

in an Apocalypse ; the shadows it casts may take strange shapes, but our first regard must be not for those shapes, that weird and portentous country which opens out before us, but for the burning of the candle. The atmosphere is dark and poisonous ; one would think that the candle must burn dull and flicker out and expire. But its triumph is to burn higher and more strongly, to contrast more sharply with those conditions amid which it burns.

So Apocalypse belonging "to a period when it seemed as if God's promises had failed,"¹ strives to shake the doubting mind from its pessimism, to make plain the implicates of faith, to arouse to hope. The Jewish Apocalypses proclaim that, be appearances what they may, there can be no final conquest by the

¹ Gibson, *Revelation*, p. 6.

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unbelieving heathen over God's chosen people, to whom were committed the promises of the fathers. The Apocalypse of St. John, written under the assurance that Messiah has come, that He has taken His power and reigns behind the veil, proclaims the impossibility of the overthrow of the Church by the world-powers massed against it, and gives utterance to the Church's desire for the rending of that veil and the outward manifestation of that power and glory. The earnest expectation of the writer waiteth for the manifestation of the Son of God. How he succeeds in portraying the conditions of the realization of his Christian hope, that his readers may share it with him, and know that this hope 'is one which can never be disappointed, we shall see later ; but the outcome of his effort, of this crown

of all apocalyptic writing, which must come home to every one, however slight his study of this book may be, is that except for the words of our Lord Himself there are no passages in the New Testament which so gloriously display the transformation wrought through the Gospel as do the most exalted ones written there by St. John.

It is sometimes supposed that apocalyptic is inclined to be weak on the ethical side, that moral teaching is not a primary interest of an apocalyptic writer as it is certainly of a prophet. This view has been encouraged by the contrast sharply drawn between the apocalyptic and the ethical elements in the Gospels, and by those fantastic notions which, in an excess of reaction from the picture of our Lord as before all things a great moral Teacher, have represented Him

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as so entirely concentrated on apocalyptic and eschatology as "not to have been interested" (I seem to recall the phrase)¹ in ethics. But not only is it, one would think, impossible to read the Gospels without realizing the extraordinary though not exclusive interest our Lord took in all questions wherein there was a separation between right and wrong, an interest in these questions for their own sake and not simply because of their relationship to the coming Kingdom, but along these lines of thought there is no clear division between apocalyptic and prophecy. Apocalyptic writers, both Jewish and Christian, lacked nothing in moral strength and insight. Righteousness is as dear to them as to the prophets. There is no idea that the

¹ It is reminiscent of Tyrrell's argument in *Christianity at the Crossroads*, but I cannot refer to the exact expression.

time to come, the supernatural age, the revelation of God and of Messiah, can be anything except a final vindication of good over evil, the doing of right by the Judge of the whole earth, a manifestation of what in a modern term we may call the survival-value of all goodness (while the corruption of wickedness is for destruction only), the sealing of those who have done after the way of the Lord and kept His commandments. Where apocalyptic generally differs from prophecy is in its sense that a wholly new era—the future as opposed to the present—must dawn, a different and outwardly supernatural set of conditions arise, before God's purposes can be made clear and His ways justified.¹ The prophet speaks to his contemporaries and bids them see God's hand in the working out of

¹ See Charles in *Hastings' Dict. Bib.* i. 109-10.

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the history in which they play their part, and rouse themselves to help His counsels to prevail. The apocalypticist, speaking in the name of some worthy of past time, no longer with the "Thus saith the Lord" of the prophet, bids Israel endure in patience the present discontent and wait for the end. Both prophet and apocalypticist demand righteousness in God's people, but for the one it is the righteousness which is ready to be up and doing, with the other it approaches what we call quietism : everything is determined ; the saint is not so much a fellow-worker with God as a pious observer of God's works. Clough's poem gives something of the spirit which a writer of Apocalypse would try to breathe into those who cared to listen to him—

December days were bleak and chill,

The winds of March were wild and drear,

And, nearing and receding still,

Spring never would, we thought, 'be here.

The leaves that burst, the suns that shine,

Had, not the less, their certain date :—

And thou, O human heart of mine,

Be still, refrain thyself and wait.

St. John wrote what was not only an Apocalypse but a prophecy. He spoke as a Christian prophet under the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ words as pertinent and as much needed by those Churches to which he wrote as any uttered by St. Peter or St. Paul. He and those to whom he writes have their place in history ; there is no use of the names of the past, no creation of artificial conditions such as mark the Jewish Apocalypses of the time. "Under the form of an Apocalypse," as has been said (and, it may be added, with the apocalyptist's outlook on 'the good time coming), "he spoke as a prophet."

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Whatever difficulties confront him who seeks to penetrate to the true meaning of those visions which connect this book with the Jewish Apocalypses, the reader who has the ear ready to hear cannot fail to catch the new strains, the fresh inspiration, which mark the recipient of Christ's Spirit—and of no other—the originality of what, as it comes to us, is a new creation in Christ, the note of a finality, in the future indeed, yet already foregone, and that not in potency only but in fact, since the Word of God has been incarnate and the Lamb slain, and the Living One holds the keys of death and of hell. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy ; in the witness borne to Him, the true prophet is seen and prophecy is completed.

II

THE HEAVENLY BACKGROUND IN THE APOCALYPSE

THE Apocalypse is a book written during a time of persecution, with yet more persecution looming in the future, a time when it seemed as though the great accumulated forces of ancient power and civilization (note the extraordinary material sources of Babylon as catalogued in the eighteenth chapter) were to be mobilized with one object, the crushing of the infant Church. Yet throughout the book runs the strongest possible current of hope in the outcome of that future, not the hope

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which snatches at a bare possibility of escape, but the hope which cannot conceive of failure. What is the explanation of such a confidence upon the part of the writer? .

Now we can quite truly answer by pointing to the whole warrant for optimism which was an essential part of primitive, historic Christianity. The life and works of Christ, the astonishing fact that His death, which seemed at first the fruit of weakness, was the source of strength, the Resurrection and the new life in the Spirit, all these were conclusive grounds for the expectation of the triumph of the Church built up on and inspired by these facts. And in the Apocalypse we see the expression of the common Christian conviction as we find it elsewhere • in the New Testament. There is nothing peculiar to the Apoca-

lypse, no new message to confirm and establish the believer's heart, in such assurances that, for the Christian, hope can never go unfulfilled as "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the Living One ; and I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore," or "Thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with Thy blood men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests." Primitive Christianity faced the world and the future with the two convictions that Christ had triumphed and was in glory, and that His people should triumph and be in glory with Him. The second and prophetic conviction depended entirely on the first and historic conviction. The Beloved Son came before the Beloved Community as its necessary *prius* and only sufficient

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explanation. We cannot, I think, in the long run have any certainty about the meaning and value of the Church unless we allow for (critical and historical problems may debar some from going further than this) a more than equivalent meaning and value in Him without Whom there would have been no Church at all.

But, as I say, there is nothing peculiar to the Apocalypse in this. This is all common Christian ground. But if one came to the Apocalypse with no previous knowledge of Christian beliefs, those creative forces from which Christian literature sprang, anxious simply to discover the secret of the hope which, so one had been told, contrasted so strongly with the widespread pessimism of the ancient world, the immediately impressive thing in the book, when once

the introductory chapters had been passed and the revelation developed, would be the sense of the reality, the relationship to earth, and the positive activity of the heavenly background. And it is of this that I wish us to think at this time.

Now this also is really a part of common Christian teaching and belief, always, at least, implicit and to some extent explicated in other books of the New Testament. When our Lord says that in heaven the children's angels ever gaze on their Father's face, and that He has beheld Satan as lightning fallen from heaven: when St. Paul speaks of the principalities and the power, ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις, of Christ as seated far above all authority and power and dominion and every name belonging to the future as well as to the present age,

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language almost repeated by St. Peter, who proclaims the subjection of angels and authorities and powers to Jesus Christ : when the writer to the Hebrews speaks of the angels as ministering spirits, and of his readers as having come to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven : when in 2 Peter and the Epistle of Jude we hear of the rebellion and the punishment of some among the angels—we realize that the New Testament as a whole suggests what may be called a dynamic rather than a static view of heaven. Heaven is not earth's unmoved environment, where there is no movement, no distinctions of grades or degrees of exaltation. It is inhabited country ; it is not a form of absolute existence which sacrifices all variety to unity, motion

to rest, or even feeling and action to the noble ideal of contemplation.

But in all the books of the New Testament, except only for the Apocalypse, this is not deliberately pressed upon the reader's thought and attention. And very naturally: for the action of the Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles, is wrought out not in heaven, but on earth. We are not chiefly concerned with what has passed or continues in heaven (the moment we speak of heaven in other than apocalyptic language we feel at once the difficulty of the language of the time-process—past and present—when applied to it), but, in the Gospels, with Bethlehem, and Galilee, and Jerusalem, and above all Mount Calvary; in the Acts and the Epistles with Jerusalem, and Antioch, and Ephesus, and Philippi, and Corinth, and Rome. In these places

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the battle for God and Christ rages ; in them souls have to be saved, devils routed, and the Church built up. From heaven God gives grace ; to heaven men aspire ; but the great drama of the world's salvation is played out on earth.

Now we must not rush to extremes. The Apocalypse does not at all deny or depreciate the importance of the earthly historical. Not only do the visions which the seer beholds work themselves out on earth by events, but it is significant how often (twenty-nine times in all) in the Apocalypse our Lord is described by that title "The Lamb," which is His in virtue of His earthly temporal action. Even if in xiii. 8 the words "from the foundation of the world" are to be taken with "the Lamb slain," as, despite recent exegetical tendency, is still, I believe, most probable, there is no undervalua-

tion of Calvary in favour of a timeless or supra-temporal redemption. The virtue of the great action of Calvary is carried back into the eternal world, but is not sublimated into an illustration of something that was always true, save only in so far as the Word of God must ever be regarded as possessing the will to sacrifice Himself. But for all that, the setting of the book does make a quite unique impression upon us by bringing heaven before us as a true counterpart of earth, as a place or sphere where things are done, as the great voice from the heavenly temple cries when the seventh bowl is outpoured. It is interesting to observe how the heavenly action develops. We have the first vision in the fourth chapter, the adoring elders and living creatures, with the seven spirits of God burning before the throne

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from which proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. Next comes the unsealing of the book by the Lamb and the adoration of the countless hosts of heaven. With the opening of the seals the earthly drama begins to develop, but (and this we note constantly throughout the book) the development is checked by a sudden vision of judgment, of God upon His throne, and the wrath of the Lamb and the last great cosmic upheavals. This is followed by one of the most beautiful of all the pictures of the Apocalypse, the redeemed in heaven who have passed triumphant through the tribulations of earth, who now serve God in His temple and have the Lamb for their Shepherd.

The reality of the heavenly action is made still clearer by the half-hour's silence which follows the opening of the seventh seal. If it is to be interpreted

as the silence of expectation, or the dead silence which precedes the thunderclap, it is another proof of the reality of these great events for those who view them if not *sub specie æternitatis*, as that can be said of God alone, at least with a wider vision than is possible on earth. The angelic activity continues with the sounding of the trumpet and the declaration of the passing away of time. The eleventh chapter is more directly concerned with earth, the prophesyings of the witnesses and their fate; but with their ascension we are once more brought back to heaven to hear the song of ascription of the kingdom of the world to the Lord and His Christ, to mark the opening of the heavenly temple, and to watch the war between Michael and the dragon decisive in heavenly places, so that the command goes forth, " Rejoice,

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O heavens, and ye that dwell in them." After this the scene once again changes to the earth, to the coming of the beast and his power, though the object of the beast's warfare is not simply to rule on the earth, but to challenge the heavenly reign of God, as his blasphemies against God and His tabernacle and them that dwell in the heaven show. In the fourteenth chapter the answer to the beast is given by three angels declaring the hour of judgment, the fall of Babylon, and the fate of those who worship the beast, with the voice of blessing upon the faithful dead whose earthly toil now receives its reward.

The heavenly action continues with the solemn picture of the angels with the seven bowls full of God's wrath coming forth from the tabernacle, and the pouring of the bowls. The drama now draws

to that close, more than once in earlier passages apparently on the point of manifestation, but hitherto held in check. There is the great gathering at Har-Magedon, the fall of Babylon, the heavenly triumph, with the announcement that the marriage of the Lamb is come. The Word of God Himself now comes forth, followed by the heavenly armies, to the struggle against the beast. The victory over the beast and the false prophet, and the binding of the devil, with the thousand years' peace and joint reign with Christ of those who had done their earthly part of faithful protest against the beast, is the beginning of the end. That end comes with the final overthrow of Satan and his hordes in the last great assault upon the saints. The judgment passed, the book closes with the vision of the holy city, now finally at peace,

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coming down from heaven, having the glory of God, to be the eternal home of the faithful, the light of the nations, adorned at once with heavenly splendours and with the glory that the kings of the earth bring to it. The new heaven and the new earth find, as it were, their common centre in the new and holy city.

Now you may say that the Apocalypse is a supreme example of picture-thinking, and that any attempt on our part to envisage heavenly reality as in any way conforming to the vision of the writer must fail. But I would press this point—has our habitual thought of the nature of heavenly or transcendental reality much affinity with that which underlies the apocalypticist's picture, the feeling of extraordinary interest and positive activity on the part of the unseen powers, the invisible yet conscious

ministers of God ? We believe, of course, in God as the source of strength and energy ; we apprehend the reality of the gift of that strength to the individual, with less vividness as supplied to the Church, in some quite vague way as a necessary cosmic support given to the world. Our belief in the Blessed Trinity helps to preserve us from the danger of reducing the life of God to a static passionlessness like that of the unmoved Mover of the Aristotelian theology ; our belief that the redemptive work of Christ was the redemptive work of God Incarnate, is an assurance against any possibility of a return to the Epicurean doctrine of the " gods who live at ease," unconcerned in man's estate. But for all that, it is, I am sure, difficult for many of us to conceive of the heavenly life as of one in which there is movement, activ-

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ity, a doing of things. Now and then a story as of guardian angels makes us wonder for a moment whether there are not purposive forces, obedient to God, with that fullness of personal life which differentiates obedience as we see it in men from that solemn and awe-inspiring but still, as far as we know, necessitated and mechanical obedience of the heavenly bodies, of tides and times and seasons : for it is only in a figure that the poet can say of Duty—

Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens through Thee are
fresh and strong.

But our momentary wonder too often sinks back into carelessness or that practical incredulity which by never posing such questions comes to treat them as belonging to the region of mythology or superstition rather than of true religion.

And it is extremely difficult to form anything like a satisfactory mental conception of the dynamic character of the heavenly world, of how the forces it contains function. I know of one not unsuccessful attempt to imagine and express it. In one of the late Hugh Benson's apocalyptic novels the dying woman, bereft of living, waking consciousness and power, taught that religion is void of all truth, and now availing herself of a state-sanctioned euthanasia, yet with Bishop Blougram's "plaguy hundredth chance" deep in her mind, has the following experience:—

The enclosure melted, with a sound of breaking, and a limitless space was about her—limitless, different to everything else, and alive and astir. It was alive, as a breathing, panting body is alive—self-evident and overpowering—it was one, yet it was many; it was immaterial, yet abso-

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lutely real—real in a sense in which she never dreamed of reality. . . .

Yet even this was familiar, as a place often visited in dreams is familiar; and then, without warning, something resembling sound or light, something which she knew in an instant to be unique, tore across it. . . .

And we who go on our way in the midst of material things, we who have to wrestle not only with our own weaknesses and failures, with the actual evils of the world and the hostilities of a positive unbelief, but with that aloofness, that unfamiliarity with the whole idea of a spiritual order transcending yet environing ours, in which, as in an unfriendly atmosphere, modern thinking and modern practice are so deeply immersed,—we should find that a fuller realization, not only of the fact of that order but of the force emanating from it, of an activity in that order, however inde-

finable, but still parallel to our own best endeavours and most earnest efforts for the furtherance of the good, would be a help and comfort,—not indeed such as his rapture into Paradise brought to St. Paul, or his visions through heaven's open door to St. John, but the help and comfort which those who have not seen and yet have believed can gain and know themselves the richer.

III

THE EARTHLY DRAMA: TRIALS, SUFFERINGS, JUDGMENTS

WE pass from the heavenly background, from those spheres whence the universal battle between good and evil is seen to have but one certain ending, though the heavenly powers are not mere-spectators but actual participants in the battle, to the lower region of earth where, while the conflict runs its course, only the assurance that faith gives can mediate to the servants of God the knowledge that in the end all will be well. Here hope is not easily given ; it must be wrestled for. Necessary as

it is to the true life of the soul, it cannot be taken for granted. So we have now to see that while for the inspired seer the issue is never in doubt, there are revealed in his book the trials, not only physical, but spiritual, which attend upon those who, while they are saved by hope, behold not yet that for which they hope. With the eye of faith they see Jesus, but they see not yet all things subjected to Him ; and till the hour of that final triumph strikes they have to endure all that can discourage, all that can suggest the greatest and most agonizing doubt of all, the doubt which Frederic Myers had in mind when he said that of all questions he would have put to the Sphinx he would have put this first—Is the Universe friendly? that is, is goodness rooted in its constitution, stuff of its stuff, its final goal?

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The messages to the seven Churches prove that St. John understood the needs in this supreme matter of those to whom he wrote. Trials and sufferings, such as he knew were pressing on them or casting upon them their coming shadows, called not only for that resistance and endurance whereby men set their teeth to bear present ills in the might of an iron will, but for that more finely-tempered and less readily achieved quality of soul through which the spiritual outlook and vision are preserved undulled, and no *arrière-pensée* of doubt finds a path, however narrow, into the heart. Marcus Aurelius was wrong in thinking that it was sheer obstinacy which gave Christians courage to meet death as they did, but he was right in thinking that heroic things can be done and endured in virtue of that alone, and that such

obstinacy does not reveal a high degree of spiritual life. We catch in St. John's words of praise and in his warnings to the Churches, a sense of the need of something more than simple resistance to evil. Ephesus endured and wearied not, but the loss of her first spirit of love had brought down her life to a level where vision was more difficult and her whole life more pedestrian. Pergamum holds fast the name and confesses the faith of Christ ; yet could such evil and licentious teaching as we hear of have invaded the Church at all, had she not only raised that name and faith as a standard against the world, but measured her whole life by the hopes it should have brought ? And when in every case a promise is given to him that overcometh, the thought is not limited to endurance against persecution. It is the victory

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against everything which draws the Church back from that fullness of revelation and that newness of outlook and, with it, of life, which it had been privileged to receive.

For that hopefulness of spirit which looks beyond the immediate necessities of courage under difficulties and endurance in sufferings to the inevitable (for the Christian it is inevitable) outcome of difficulties and sufferings, is both a grace that we should desire for ourselves, and a witness to the world of what it means to be a Christian. A certain hopefulness of outlook on the future all men who desire at all to impress the world for its advance and betterment must have. Yet the more you prolong that future, and the more you devote your attention to man's circumstances rather than to man's soul, or to his soul

only in relation to the earthly circumstances which so powerfully condition the character of its life, the more difficult does a final hopefulness become. If the final word on man and on conscious existence is anything of the character of the ghastly vision at the end of one of Mr. H. G. Wells' books,¹ then the word hope should be expunged from the vocabulary. "Abandon hope all ye who enter here," is written large over some of our most up-to-date reconstructions of truth, and prophecies of the destiny awaiting mankind. What place, in fact, would there be in the modern world for a hope that man's tragic yet not ignoble history shall not end in utter fruitlessness, and in all things being as though he had never been, were it not for the Christian Gospel and the hope that Gospel carries with it?

¹ *The Time Machine.*

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A little hope that when we die
We reap our sowing,

is the utmost that the world seems able
to reach apart from Christ.

It is only by dwelling on a few passages, and not by anything like an analysis of the whole book, that I can hope to show how in the Apocalypse what the writer gives us is not a vision of easy and certain triumph from the point of view of those who actually play their part in the unfolding of the drama ; that, on the contrary, the triumph has to be waited for, and its achievement fulfilled in the face of almost overwhelming forces of evil.

First of all there is the scene at the opening of the fifth seal, the souls of the martyrs impatient for the retribution which delays, fancying, as men account slowness, that the Lord is slow. The

answer is twofold—a gift, and a command which is also a promise. The white robe given to each signifies the value and the crowning of the individual sacrifice. The exhortation to wait till the tale of suffering in God's service is complete, declares the approach of a climax in which the individual has his part, but as a member of a larger whole. There can be no exact and conclusive manifestation of the righteousness of God in connexion with the individual sufferer. He is never overlooked, and he will have his place in the great consummation; but God does not answer at once the cry of the persecuted soul for a full vindication. Divine retribution does not serve the ends of a personal longing for vengeance. And we know how easy it is to confuse the true instinct that sin, especially deliberate and cruel wickedness, deserves

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punishment, with the longing for the humiliation of personal enemies, because they are one's own enemies. The writer of the 109th Psalm had certainly the former feeling, but what makes such a psalm difficult for Christians is the sense of the intrusion of the latter. One of the elements of our Christian hope is of a time to come when evil shall be judged, when every apparent success of wicked aims and purposes shall be openly reversed. But if that hope carries us away to complain that God does not now stretch forth His arm and smite the evil-doer, and justify His servants, we are in danger of displaying a less than Christian faith. That there is even a present blessing to cheer those who endure patiently whatever may befall them in the service of God, is the witness of Christian martyrdom and patience from

St. Stephen and St. Paul to the present day ; but we turn history into melodrama if we allow ourselves to become uneasy and disquiet because the wicked often do flourish like a green Bay tree, and there is no succession of public triumphs for injured innocence. The poet's sneer is justified from his unbelieving and naturalistic level—

 Their lovelier faith, their happier crown,
 But history laughs and weeps it down.

History is not, any more than nature, a witness to God which compels belief because its testimony is as a simple book, to understand which neither faith nor spiritual insight is needed. And the vision that follows the sounding of the sixth trumpet, of the vast forces of destruction let loose upon the earth, while yet the rest of mankind which was left alive

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repented, not either of their idolatrous religion or of their evil practices, carries us still further : even when to the eye of faith the sore judgments of God are falling and smiting, these have no power in themselves, no power of compulsion, to convince or convert. The soul of man must answer the revelation of God. God, Who has given man freedom, gives him (I think we may say He could not but have given him) the freedom to deny his God, to challenge Him,—and not without a show of success on that level from which faith and spiritual insight are excluded,—to prove His own existence, or at least His power, if not His will, to come to the help of the oppressed and to save His servants. Let Him save them and we will believe in Him—such is the implicit taunt, a kind of reversal of that thrown at the crucified Christ,

which is hurled at God by those who, denying God, have yet made up their minds as to what salvation would mean did God exist. And in the face of such denials, by whatever fair and reasonable arguments of apologetic we try to meet them, we must never be untrue to our Christian hope, which throws into the future the final overturning of all such denials and allows to us of that time only the foretaste which comes through faith, and, normally at least, not the satisfaction of actual experience.

The same subjection of the present to the future, the deferment of victory and therefore the continuation of trials, is seen, I think, in the difficult vision of the two witnesses in the eleventh chapter. It is true that for a time they have powers which protect them against attack, and enable them to call down suffering upon

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their enemies. But that time is limited. They have their testimony of prophecy to fulfil, and when that is done they are overcome by the beast. Nor in their resurrection and ascension is there more than a personal salvation for themselves. The fear that falls upon their enemies does not break the power of the beast.

It is in the beast that in the latter chapters of the book the force of spiritual evil is concentrated, while all the evils of the world are summed up in the vision of Babylon. While the beast wars against the saints and overcomes them, and stirs up the kings of the whole world to the battle against God, being helped by the second beast or the false prophet who works signs to bring man to worship him, and being finally overcome only by the Word of God Himself, Babylon, though guilty of the blood of saints and

martyrs, falls through the action of servants of the beast,¹ and is apparently not represented as the object of God's direct vengeance, though we are told that strong is the Lord God which judged her. But it is not of the destruction either of the beast or of Babylon that I want now to think, but of their power. For in these visions we are really in the presence of a kingdom of evil, of wickedness organized against God. In Babylon we see triumphant materialism. Her persecution of the servants of God is rather the result of her general character than, as in the case of the beast, a deliberate part of a campaign directed against God.

If that interpretation of this book is correct which sees in Babylon, primarily at least, imperial Rome such as it must have appeared to a Christian writer

¹ Rev. xvii. 16, 17.

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after the persecutions of Nero, and perhaps also of Domitian, had fallen upon the Church, we must admit that no trial exactly corresponding to that which the primitive Church had to face faces us to-day. Modern civilization may reproduce every evil which ancient Rome showed, but the Gospel has from that time to this been so much concerned with the framework and the building up of modern life, our whole political fabric owes so much to the work of the Church in past ages, that a deliberately anti-Christian society engrossed in purely material ends and persecuting the Church is something strange to us. Here and there, of course, signs of it have been visible, but on no very great or very prolonged scale. But what the future has in store we do not know. Materialism as a philosophy may be bankrupt

and yet be the unspoken, unconscious implication of a very vast number of actions and very widespread attitudes.

Materialism as the sheer oppression of brute force and conscienceless wealth may be a losing cause—and yet the winning one may be a more cultured, more civilized, more humanitarian, and yet almost as unchristian, and much more dangerous a form of the same thing. Now and then we hear of the Church possibly reverting in spirit and in her relationship to the world to that characteristic of her in the years before the Christian Empire. I do not think that anything like an exact or a near parallel between the possibilities of the future and the facts of the past is to be looked for, but I can very well imagine a future in which the Church will appear to have as uphill a struggle against the brilliance

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and the promises of a society which rejects the specifically Christian interpretation of life, while perhaps retaining some kind of interest in religion, as she must have seemed to have in prospect when the Apocalypse was written. Not only can modern civilization far surpass in everything that appeals to the senses and adorns the material side of life all that St. John has to say of Babylon, but with it goes a liberality of opinion and of treatment, a readiness to admit that every one must find the life which suits him and answers to his temperament, that is of peculiar danger to the Christian doctrine that the truth as it is in Christ Jesus is for all, to the inevitable exclusiveness of Christianity. The primitive Church could make no compromise with the various cults and worships around it ; it is precisely what,

both in faith and morals, the Church to-day is again and again expected to do. Hatred of the human race was the first great charge brought by society as a whole against the Church. It is a charge which may endure to the end, and to maintain our ground against it is hardly possible unless a vision of the conclusion of the whole matter, of the passing and fall of Babylon, let Babylon take what form it will, belongs to that hope of ours which we know cannot fail.

And the Beast? Everything that the Apocalypse tells us of this vision of evil suggests the most deliberate and implacable hostility, hostility by no means wholly unsuccessful, directed against God and His people. In this respect the Beast surpasses Babylon, though the historic connexion is close enough if the number of the Beast is to be taken as

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representing Nero Caesar. And if we can press no precise modern parallel to Imperial Rome, still less can we to Nero. And if the young Church, with her new inspiration indeed, but still without any strong backing of experience, and of assurance of survival given through ages of conflict, could face the horrors of that first persecution, and live through it without losing hold of the new hope for the world as well as for the Church which the Gospel had brought, we who can ever refresh our souls and find good cheer for our hearts in the great Christian record of the past, have no right to despair for a moment, under whatever combination of adverse circumstances, of the future of that holy society which knows the worst that the devil or man can work against her and yet lives.

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To the Church I dare to apply those words which Swinburne sang of the French Republic—

Who is this that riseth red with wounds so splendid,
All her breast and brow made beautiful with
scars,
In her eyes a light as of pain long ended,
In her voice a song as of the morning stars?

IV

THE SONGS OF PRAISE IN THE APOCALYPSE

WE know how in Greek Tragedy the action is interrupted, its crises, past or approaching, marked, and its moral pointed by choric interludes. Something of the same kind is to be found in the Apocalypse, though the arrangement is not so elaborate. But the seven choric songs of the book are both beautiful in themselves and worthy of attention. They are of the nature of commentary upon the developing facts, and while we ourselves are looking to those facts for a message of encouragement

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and inspiration, for the teaching of patience and the confirming of our hope, we may turn aside to see how the realities of the heavenly world and the earthly drama present themselves to these watchers on the heights.

The first chorus is in the fourth chapter, the opening chapter of the Revelation proper. The four living creatures begin the song with the threefold ascription of holiness to God, the Almighty and the Eternal, and it is taken up by the elders who see in the creation proof that to God the glory and the honour and the power are to be given. "They were and they were created"—that is they existed in the Divine Mind, they were planned by the Divine Will, and then were brought to material expression. It is the Gospel of Creation which the living creatures and elders hymn. It is a simple yet

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never antiquated apologetic. Let all the niceties of the argument from design be dismissed, let the wise debate as to the precise form in which evolution is to be asserted, the simple heart returns to its assurance that the things that are seen bear witness to an everlasting power and divinity. Other parts of the Christian Creed, perhaps the concentration on the fact of Christ Himself, have seemed at times to overshadow the faith in God the Creator, and we are told that power to create is not in itself proof of goodness and love, nor deserving of adoration. But can the mind rest in such a dualism? If the words Creator and Creation have any meaning—and you note how St. John goes behind the mere act of material formation to the thought, necessarily eternal, in the Divine Mind—can we be content to say, can we believe that

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creation, that first great act on which we and all our ideas and hopes depend, is non-moral in quality, merely a sign of power? I am not able to say how in creation love can be shown to be mixed with power, but some harmony there must be. The elders' song and our own instincts in the face of nature and of nature's Lord cannot be irrational.

The second chorus¹ is the new song in which, besides the original singers, join many angels and finally all creation. It is the hymn of redemption, the praise of the Lamb Who was slain for the redemption of men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and of God, to whom all those redeemed by the Lamb belong and become kings and priests. If there is any difficulty in realizing the Gospel of Creation, there is

¹ v. 9-14.

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none here: From the first all Christian hope has been bound up and hidden in the Lamb of God that taketh away, because He bears, the sin of the world. The hopelessness which during those hours between Good Friday and Easter Day pressed down the Church was that of the desperate thought—We had imagined—and we were wrong—that He should redeem Israel. Both creation and redemption are facts of the religious order, but religion comes to a point, to a focus, in redemption. The whole world, already given in creation but not immediately interpreted thereby, is now seen as the object of God's love. It is interesting that Plato, that greatest of all pre-Christian seers, sees in the world, the *κόσμος*, the only-begotten Son of God in virtue, of creation. It is the fairest and best of all things, truly

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sprung from God. But he has no Gospel of Redemption, no act of sacrifice, such as Christian thought finds in the offering of the Lamb, no Divine means of repairing the harm suffered by his beautiful world—for though by the *κόσμος* we must understand the totality of existence, which has in God its author, and by no means simply or chiefly the world of men, sin must be regarded as taking something from the original perfection of creation. And in the Apocalypse the hymn of redemption is a universal hymn. “Every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them,” join in the great ascription. We can set no limits to our hopes of what a Divine act of redemption means; we cannot stop short of St. Paul’s vision of the deliver-

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ance of the creation itself from the bondage of corruption. So before the action of the book develops, before we are plunged into the dreadful mysteries of the seals and trumpets and bowls, we hear the song which reminds us that we have our part in a world, not only created by God, but redeemed to Him—that in virtue of that redemption we have a royal and priestly estate which nothing can take from us.

The third chorus¹ comes before the afflictions that fall upon the earth through the sounding of the trumpets. The innumerable multitude, standing before the Throne and the Lamb, first ascribes salvation to God and the Lamb. They are answered by the angels with the sevenfold ascription—Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power,

¹ vii. 9-12.

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strength. The key-word of the ode is its opening salvation *σωτηρία*. Of God and the Lamb they say He is Saviour. We hear the testimony of experience : in the preceding chorus the redeemed reign on earth ; in this one they have come out of the great tribulation, and have found salvation no idle word. What they pass through is for the individual the trial of his faith and the test of its value and reality. Of the reward which has been prepared for them the description is among the most beautiful and satisfying in the book. In the service of God they continue, protected by His near presence, freed from all material sufferings, while God Himself fulfils His prophet's word and makes all sorrow and sighing to vanish away : and their Shepherd is the Lamb. It is sometimes brought as a

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charge against us that we are too ready to bring in the next world to redress the ills of the present one, that not compensation for suffering but the abolition of its causes should be our first care. Yet, however true it may be that a comfortable preaching of another world can act as an anodyne, a soporific, where what we need is a stimulus to toil, no satisfaction in earthly labour is so complete that there is not room, and urgent need, for its fulfilment beyond the grave. Incompleteness, imperfection, the uphill struggle, however real the struggle be, seem to cling round the earthly pilgrimage and its works as companions from whom there is no escape. No Christian can say that the knowledge of good and the service of God in this life supply all the spiritual good on which his heart is set ; and can any man of the

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world, any who has made a name and served his fellows well in the State or in business, say that he has found life so lavish in its gifts that there is no desire left in his heart for some better country where he may find what was denied him here? We have no cause to be ashamed of a Christian hope of a blessed compensation, for even if, as Emerson taught, there is a law of compensation running through life, it is of the roughest quality, and many miss its kindly help. It is assured only where there is assurance of God and of immortal life.

The fourth chorus follows the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Voices in heaven declare that the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of God and of His Christ, Whose reign shall be everlasting, while the song of the elders

¹ xi. 15-18.

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shows the meaning of this to be a twofold judgment, a reward to the servants of God, but destruction to the destroyers of the earth. The first utterance is noteworthy. The kingdom of the world is not to be left over to powers of evil. However much the world as dominated by a world-power hostile to the true God may seem given over to wickedness, to be a magnitude opposed to God, the world is neither by origin nor by destination evil. As the world proceeds from God, so it must return to Him. We catch the note of a more than individual salvation, of a triumph of God which brings with it the recovery of the world from all that had corrupted it. There is indeed a judgment and an act of retribution, but it falls not upon the world as an evil thing, but on those responsible for that contrast which is

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involved in differentiating the Spirit of God from the spirit that is in the world. We speak of worldliness as of something clean contrary to the mind of Christ and the purposes of God. And no harm is done if we know what we mean. But harm is done if we come to think of the natural order itself as of something connected with the spiritual order only by way of antithesis. The language of the New Testament is often difficult by reason of the distinctions, not always observable on the surface, made as this or that aspect of the world is in view. But it is surely remarkable that of all New Testament phrases dear to the Christian's heart one stands out above all. It is the *Sic Deus dilexit mundum*, the charter of our faith, the all-sufficient and only-sufficient vindication of our creed.

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The fifth chorus at the beginning of the fourteenth chapter is part of a picture of the Lamb in the midst of the firstfruits of the redeemed, and follows on the vision of the two beasts. No words are given : the song which comes from heaven can be learnt only by those who attend upon the Lamb. It is a particular exemplification of a general truth. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what God hath prepared for them that love Him. When we speak of spiritual gifts of vision, understanding and the like, is our language but empty sounding, or are there secrets between God and His servants which can neither be explained to, nor apprehended by, those who do not rise in thought above material things, who will pay no heed to the things of faith unless all its mysteries can first

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be set before them so that they may carefully determine whether they will make trial of them or not? They do not fathom the truth, He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith. And our words will avail little till some humility, some doubt of themselves and their self-sufficiency, touches their heart. Only so can they catch the sound of heavenly melodies.

The sixth chorus is a song of victory.¹ Those who have triumphed over the Beast stand beside the glassy sea and sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb. There is perhaps a double reminiscence, of the crossing of the Red Sea, symbolical of the trials through which they have come, and of the song of Redemption in the fifth chapter. The theme as described to us is the righteousness

¹ xv. 2.

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of God's ways, and the glorifying of His ways in the sight of all people, perhaps with special reference to the coming outpouring of the seven bowls, regarded for a moment as already come to pass. There is no intrusion here of a desire for personal vindication, for vengeance upon personal enemies. All feeling of that kind is swallowed up in the thought which comes sometimes with overpowering force that God should make public manifestation of His truth and righteousness, that those who do not love Him shall learn to fear Him, that He shall receive the tribute of universal worship. The martyrs freshly come from the struggle yet forget themselves, their own sufferings and victory, in contemplating that whole in which they are so small a part. And in any righteous jealousy that we have for the

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cause of God, when we see how the wise of this world often appear to leave God out in their reckonings of the future, almost to construct a doctrine of the last things, an eschatology in which God has no part or place, is not this hope ours? All who believe in God, all for whom the word has that richness of meaning which Christians find in it as illuminated by the revelation of the Father which Christ brought, look for that age when at last appearance shall correspond to reality, and God's voice shall break the silence He has seemed to keep and men have abused. Only according to the measure of our power, too feeble for the task, does God at present allow His rule to be vindicated and His character revealed. I recall some lines which in their present form are due to Dr. Forsyth, and express

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exactly that attitude towards God which, only God Himself, according to His ways and not ours, can finally dispel.

They talk to us so of an immanent God,

As though man were the true transcendent,
As though man were the lord of all the earth,
And God the poor defendant ;
As though God were arraigned with a very black
case,

On the skill of His bar dependent,
And—I shouldn't like to be God, says one,
For His record is not resplendent.

And the victors over the Beast know
that that cannot be the final verdict,
that God shall yet be seen and wor-
shipped as He really is.

The seventh and final chorus in the nineteenth chapter follows close upon the dirge over Babylon. It is divided into two parts. The first part expresses the joy of the great heavenly throng over the judgment on Babylon,

their words contrasting strikingly with the lamentations of those who had looked to Babylon to supply all their wants; while the second part looks forward to the marriage of the Lamb and His bride. One feels that the clouds have rolled away, though the final victory over the Devil is yet to come; but the world-spirit in its aggressive opposition to God, all the pride and luxury and material strength represented by Babylon, are at an end. "Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory to Him." True joy cannot but follow upon the vision of the glory of God, upon every sincere doxology. And if at times our eyes are holden that we cannot see the glory of God lightening even the darkness of our world, outweighing our trials and disappointments and sufferings—if at times very jealous, like Elijah, for

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the Lord our God, we seem to be left without manifest tokens of His power, our inner life cold and barren as the soul's dark night presses down upon us, and, to our view, the world without so full of all kinds of insolent and successful evil as to hide every trace of its Creator¹—we can look forward to that end which is more trustworthy than the weakness of our own hearts, more certain than our doubts, and know that the heavenly songs have yet to be sung, and that they await the advent of our own voices when we too shall, please God, have learnt to sing them.

¹ Cf. the famous passage in Newman's *Apologia*.

V

THE VISION OF THE END

WE saw earlier in these addresses that St. John's Apocalypse, like every apocalypse, is, as has been said, "a tract for bad times." To recall this may help us a little when we think of that most difficult passage in the twentieth chapter, which speaks of a first resurrection for the martyred dead, and of their reign with Christ. For we must remember that while to us the story of the martyrs of the past, of their heroic witness for Christ, is a glorious apologetic, warming our hearts and strengthening our faith, to the first

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martyrs and still more to their comrades who were not called to face the supreme test, such suffering and death must at times have seemed a stumbling-block, as though God's hand was shortened that He should not save.

There are passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews which seem to show that the Christian leaders could not count absolutely, as a matter of course, on the readiness of all converts to strive, even to the blood of sacrifice, against a falling away from Christ in times of affliction and persecution. It is easy to say whether of others or of ourselves that suffering is part of the Christian's lot, that neither the teaching nor the example of our Lord gives His followers the right to imagine that they will escape: and all the time may lurk the thought, hidden even from the thinker—This is not for

me. And when a special difficulty of this kind is to be met, the answer that can mean most, that can appeal to the soul as worthy of the problem, is that of a special and counterbalancing hope. It is precisely what is given in the vision of the thousand years' reign. Humanly speaking, everything turned on whether these Christians stood firm, whether they added another mighty link to the chain of Christian endurance, of Christian willingness to bear all for Christ, that had already begun to be forged, or whether they broke and ran and cared not what became of the colours of the King so long as they could save themselves unto the life of the present. Theirs was a responsibility such as comes to few ; theirs should be a reward in which not all could share. The promise carries us back to our Lord's

words to His apostles, "Ye which have followed Me . . . shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." And surely we may say that in the Apocalypse it is the fact of their reigning, and not of their reigning for a thousand years, on which we should stop to think.

How true of them are St. Paul's words, "joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified together." It is something of a fashion to be contemptuous of any suggestion of special recompense or privilege as motive or inducement to the work of hero or martyr. And truly in such things a man cannot make out a balance sheet or a profit and loss account. But a man may rightly hope that his labours will not be in vain, that into the fruits of those labours not others

only but some day he will enter. Of our Lord Himself some one did not fear to say that He for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross. To Him entered into that joy come the triumphant martyrs ; and their passage behind the veil does not mean the end of their activity. Rather does that now begin. Refusing to worship the beast, their part was but to endure ; now that they are priests of God and of Christ they begin to act. There is a concreteness about the vision which gives it a richness and the substance of a real hope, too often absent from our general assertions of immortality.

There follows the last great effort of the devil and his deceived followers to wrest the victory from the servants of God. Hardly any description is given, but there is something in the scene

which carries the mind back to the great deliverance from the hosts of Sennacherib. The evil hordes have surrounded the city of the saints, but, apparently, before they can attack it the avenging fire descends. The devil is cast into the lake of fire to join the beast and the false prophet, and, after the final judgment, all whose names are not written in the book of life have their portion in it. We are in the presence of the mystery of the final judgment upon and fate of evil. The anxious questions which men have always put receive no answers that can set at rest the inquiring soul. We can only return to truths of which we are more certain than we are of the wisdom of the questions we ask and the answers which are made to them—that God is at once all-just and all-merciful, that His revelation of Himself in Christ throws

into the light His desire to be the Saviour and not the Destroyer of men, that evil must be finally overcome in some way with which God, Who is the Truth, and measures all things as they come near to or fall away from that standard which His own Nature supplies, is satisfied. Of this we may be certain; it is the one certainty as we peer into regions where otherwise we know not how our representations, our words which are pictures of pictures, no flawless photographs of reality, correspond to the true nature of that country. Terror and hope are very near together here; for there is hope in the thought that our God shall tread evil beneath His feet and make all things so new that evil in all its forms shall alone be shut out from that second creation, though there is terror in remembering how evil can

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entwine itself with the fibres of personality and carry, unless some secret chamber still holds out, the central citadel of man's soul. On no matter is it harder to advise or assure another, more useless to think that another will see with one's own eyes; only I think it is wiser and more truly comforting, firmly to trust God than faintly to trust the larger hope.

And now all is ready for the final vision, for the revelation of the holy city, the bride of the Lamb. The material counterparts of the old time of conflict have vanished, the first heaven and the first earth, while the sea symbol of division and danger is no more. It is in a new environment that God shall now dwell, as never before, with His people. The thought of the new heaven and the new earth once more saves us from trying to

use mere abstractions which, as many an episode in the history of philosophy proves, too often stands for purely negative conceptions, to envisage transcendental and heavenly reality. St. Paul's use of the idea of a spiritual body is another instance of the same preference for the concrete when it is stripped of grossly material associations.

At last St. John sees the new and holy city. The whole description of it is worked up to form the impression of a manifestation of perfect beauty. Perfect symmetry, the most precious materials, the most glorious of ornaments are here. The Greek mind has been historically more alive to the charm, and set upon the acquisition, of beauty than the Hebrew. But the instinct for beauty is too deep-set in the heart of man to be attributed, as some art or particular efficiency may

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be, to this people and denied to that. No Christian can rightly be careless of beauty, wherever it is found, for beauty, no less than truth and goodness, is a strand in that threefold cord which is, as it were, the girdle of God. The beauties of the first heaven and the first earth should prepare us for that development, mightier in degree but not different in kind, which must come when in the fullness of His revelation God is seen to be altogether lovely. Christians have often been timid, and sometimes with good reason, of beautiful things as though they drew the heart away from God. But is not Plato right when, in one of the most wonderful passages that even he ever wrote, a passage whose impression is still fresh upon me, he speaks of the true order being to "begin from the beauties of earth and mount upward

for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is." I think we should value the Apocalypse if for no other reason, at least for this, that in the seer's vision of the final consummation there is unstinted satisfaction of all those æsthetic needs to which, as to all other needs Christianity, if it be of God, must have an answer.

In the heavenly Jerusalem we see a new and holy humanity, a temple worthy of the habitation of God. Even at this point the interpretation is not without its difficulties. We naturally think of this holy humanity as succeeding to the

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resurrection and the judgment. Not till the end comes is the Church a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle. Yet St. John, looking not only to the future, but to the new creation 'already made and present in the Church of Christ, sees the ideal already come. "The nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it." "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Words such as these reflect a mind quick to understand what the Church could mean in the midst of a natural order not yet remade by God. And all that he says of those that dwell within the city, of their freedom from everything accursed, of their service of Him Whose Name they bear engraved in their foreheads, of the perpetual light amid which they walk and of their never-ending

reign, though its complete fulfilment cannot be looked for in, nor can he refer it to, the present life of the Church, is yet already begun therein. It is because St. John knew—and we too know—what the Church can be even now, how in the Church men find what they seek elsewhere in vain, powers of the eternal world to heal and liberate and bless, a nearness to God and a conscious service of Him, that with the seer's open eye he views from afar the approach of the time when all that is now present in part shall reveal itself complete.

The city in which God's people dwell is, at the same time, the Church which God's people are. To us there may seem some confusion of images, but one only needs to read these chapters to see that there was none for St. John. And for us the two ideas come to unity in the

one notion of a perfect society. A perfect society must have its city. The Greeks, whose city states mark an era in the world's development, knew that ; all the might of the Romans when they laid hold of their ruling mission drew for inspiration upon the city of Rome ; and of Israel, gifted with no great political genius, we can never think without thinking of Jerusalem. Our modern cities fall far below our ideals, but if our cities are magnets for every kind of evil, yet in them, and only in them, is realized something of man's highest possibilities as a member of society. And between the social life of the city when seen as it might be, and the social life of the Church as that in a measure is, there exists the affinity which binds together two ideas sprung from a common root and functioning, the one on the natural,

the other on the spiritual plane. Here at least the natural and the spiritual are related not as foes but as gradations, as different levels on each of which, according to the possibilities which it affords, expression can be given to one and the same impulse and desire. A perfect city is not the same as a perfect Church, but much that you would find in the latter, binding the members together into one body, and inducing care by each for the other's things, you would find also in the former.

So this last vision of St. John looks forward to and promises the consummation of all that man desires and strives to attain. Personal as the Christian faith is in this, that to every soul it allows a special value before God, and does no wrong to all the truth contained in the thought of individual uniqueness,

yet—and here it echoes from its own new standpoint all the deepest wisdom of the world—its most far-reaching and final vision is of a redeemed society, an object of God's love, not exclusive of, but including, all the varying gifts, all the different and complementary powers, which, not in one man, but in a community, give us the range and the splendour of a glorified humanity.

Is the hope which rings through the Apocalypse a worthy hope? Does it make provision for all that is necessary to the consummation of human ideals, and worthy of Divine guidance? Does it breathe that spirit which keeps the spiritual flame bright and high in times when man must seek out every source of courage and endurance and invincible optimism, or sink beneath the buffets of adversity? If the Apocalypse is to us

no longer a puzzle to be pieced together through some ingenious reading of history, is it, therefore, a mere excrescence in Christian literature, to be cherished but for the sake of its more striking passages? To all such questions the answer seems to come along these lines—in the Apocalypse we see how at the first epoch of supreme crisis in the Church's life in relation to the world, there was given to the Church, in a message of encouragement to sorely-tried communities, what is nothing less than a Christian philosophy of history. It is a philosophy of history in which are blended the vision from the heights and the dark uncertain issue of the earthly struggle, as seen by those in the midst of it. To the doubts of these comes for hope and encouragement the assurance that in the heavenly places there are

hopes; no dreams issuing from the false gates of ivory deflect his gaze from those times, be they far-distant or near at hand, when the last mystery shall be displayed and the final fullness of revelation shall come. And as to-day we read the Apocalypse we feel something of that inspiration which centuries ago it brought, we know that the hope it contains is strong enough to sustain us in the midst of a raging and a darkened world. For even in the midst of that the Holy City is silently building, and already there is a light in the sky which lightens more and more towards the perfect day.

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